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# Lifelong Learning: Ladder and Lifeline

February 2017



*University Alliance Spotlight Report*

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 University  
Alliance

Making the difference



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## Foreword



In a world of fast-paced change with breakthroughs in machine learning, mass communications and robotics dramatically changing the way we live and work, everyone agrees that lifelong learning is important.

But enabling it is complex – encompassing a range of issues and policy areas including education and skills, work and pensions, and public health. As a result, and despite considerable good will, few practical policies have been introduced. It is time to change that. Lifelong learning should play a central role in achieving government priorities around productivity, place and social mobility.

As a mission group that represents universities, our starting point has been to think about how universities, within a wider system, can play their part. Of course, they are only one piece of the jigsaw – but they are an essential piece if we are to ensure that the possibility of progression to the highest levels of study is built into every learning pathway. This already exists for those taking the academic route. With the increase in degree apprenticeships and professional doctorates, it must be built into vocational pathways too.

**Professor John Latham**  
Vice Chancellor, Coventry University  
Chair, University Alliance

## Recommendations

1. **Create a centralised advice and admissions service** for lifelong learning courses, similar to UCAS, complemented by 'community learning centres'. Together these will provide impartial and expert information, advice and guidance to prospective students.
2. **Recognise Centres of Lifelong Learning Excellence** within regions to create a national network of lifelong learning excellence. This will help stimulate engagement across the UK.
3. **Reintroduce Individual Learning Accounts** to support flexible learning throughout life.
4. **Expand the coverage of Advanced Learner Loans** to allow students to spend their loans on modular learning. This will enable students to learn as and when they want to.
5. **Create flexibility within the funding system** to allow universities to offer accelerated degrees. This will enable students to complete their degrees at a pace which suits them.
6. **Introduce the Help to Learn Bonus<sup>1</sup>** – a government top up given when people invest their own money in courses. A small cash entitlement would also support take-up of learning opportunities.
7. **Broaden the Apprenticeship Levy** to include lifelong learning courses. This will give employers greater flexibility in how they support workers to gain new skills and retrain for new roles within their organisation.
8. **Encourage universities to work with public institutions** such as museums, libraries and schools, as explored in the Family Learning Pilots by the Learning and Work Institute<sup>2</sup>, to raise attainment and ambition.

# Why is lifelong learning important?

Lifelong learning brings benefits to both individuals and the country as a whole. Below are some of the reasons why we need a coordinated government approach.

## Ageing population

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) projects that 30% of people in the UK will be over 60 by 2039, up from 23% in 2015.<sup>3</sup> In the same year, one in twelve of the population will be 80 or over. This means future working lives will be longer. If we want to create an economy focused on high-skilled jobs, a large number of people already in work must have the opportunity to retrain multiple times throughout their long careers.

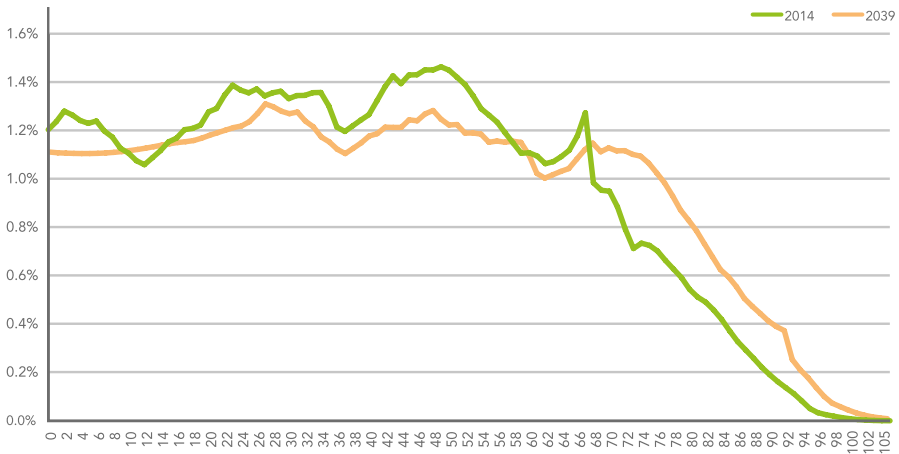


Figure 1: Predicted population distribution of the UK by 2039<sup>3</sup>

The skills and education sectors as they stand are not fully ready to do this and if nothing is done we risk limiting the types and sizes of industries that the working population can support.

Just as importantly, some studies have linked keeping mentally active in later life, which may include continuing to engage with the world of work, with preventing dementia and improving mental wellbeing.<sup>4</sup>

## The way we work

The way people enter and exit the workplace now is drastically different from even 20 years ago. A 'job for life' is a thing of the past and career paths are no longer either predictable or linear. Many people now enter and exit the workforce multiple times, often combining part-time work, self-employment and freelance work, and crossing sector boundaries.

The current higher education system heavily incentivises students to study at 18, long before they have had a chance to properly experience the world of work. Many will go on to work in an industry or job which is not directly related to their studies and some will even wish they had studied a different subject. If the education system could be changed to support graduates to continue to learn, taking additional courses as required, they would have the time and space to develop the skills required of them in different industries and careers.

## Addressing inequalities and creating opportunities for all

A government that wants to create a 'country that works for everyone' must make it easier for those who have not already benefited from higher education to take up the opportunity later in life. Not everyone will be able to study in their youth. In a fair society, these people will have second and third chances. Alongside the moral and social arguments for promoting social mobility, there is a strong economic case. The benefits of education are well documented and widely accepted.<sup>5</sup> These not only relate to individuals themselves, who receive higher pay, experience better quality of life, and are less likely to suffer from mental health problems, but also to the wider economy through raised productivity, making a greater contribution to the public purse and participating more actively in civil society.

## Fulfilling the Industrial Strategy and balancing growth

The government's Industrial Strategy Green Paper recognises that developing skills is one of the key pillars to building a stronger, fairer Britain. As University Alliance's 2016 skills report shows,<sup>6</sup> if the government is serious about rebalancing the economy and creating growth and prosperity in all regions of the UK, the whole skills ecosystem, including universities, must work together to develop skills. Academic and technical education are not two distinct streams but often overlap and intersect, particularly at higher levels. Strategy and policy must help to ensure that the right support is in place to allow people to gain the skills they need. Recent place-based initiatives such as the Northern Powerhouse and Midlands Engine are also expected to continue through the Industrial Strategy to bring a focus on regions outside of London. These will require increased skills and a diverse range of expertise to succeed.

The consultation document also rightly acknowledges the role lifelong learning should play in raising our future economic performance. Future

workers will need to retrain and gain new knowledge. The government asks how we can enable and encourage people to retrain and upskill throughout their working lives, particularly in places where industries are changing or declining. This report is a contribution to that debate.

## What are the current challenges?

Despite clear and well evidenced benefits, lifelong learning has not been a policy priority. The challenges are significant and complex, and will not be solved without serious, coordinated effort.

### The collapse in part-time students

The expansion of the higher education sector and the removal of student number controls has led to a significant increase in the number of disadvantaged young people entering full-time higher education. This, combined with the change in student funding, has led to increased investment in facilities, improvements in pastoral care and has created space for institutions to innovate and offer flexible, lower cost provision to non-traditional students.

However, since the introduction of fees, there has been a dramatic decrease in the number of part-time and mature students.

Since 2008/09, the number of part-time entrants has fallen by 44% while the number of mature students has fallen by 29%.<sup>7</sup>

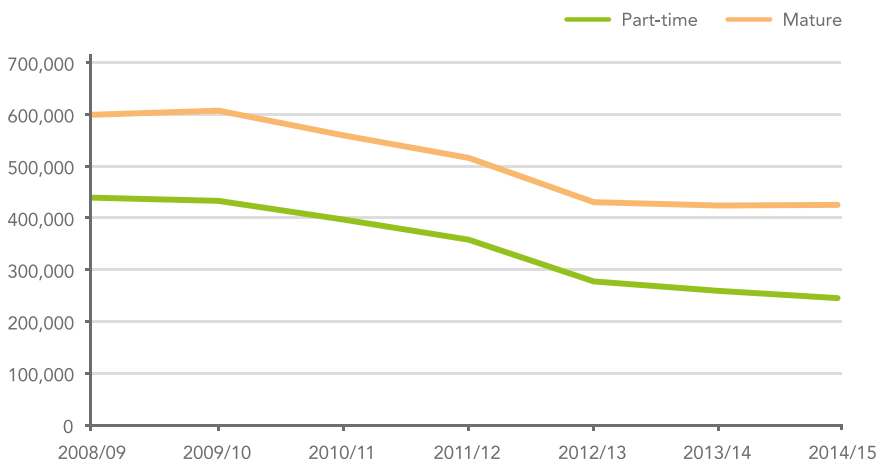


Figure 2: Decline in part-time and mature students between 2008/09 and 2014/15

The reasons for this fall have been explored in depth elsewhere<sup>8</sup> but to summarise:

- The funding system favours young, full-time, first degree students studying away from home and has excluded many part-time and shorter, modular courses.
- The recession and economic slowdown has caused many employers to decrease the amount of training and support they offer to employees.<sup>9</sup>
- Part-time and mature students tend to be more debt adverse and thus reluctant to take on student loan debt. The switch from grant to loan funding has particularly hit this group of students – with the very latest (2017) data from UCAS showing an 18% decline in applicants who are over 25 years old. This is more than 10,000 fewer mature applicants than 2016.<sup>10</sup>
- Until recently government loans for part-time study have been severely restricted and career development loans difficult to obtain. The extension of these loans is welcome. It will be important, however, to monitor their take-up closely and be open to exploring a different model if there is no reverse in the decline in part-time study.
- There has been a lack of joined up information advice and guidance (IAG) for both adults and young people which has led to a lack of understanding about what jobs are available and the options available to potential students. For example, UCAS is widely known as a comprehensive information resource for young undergraduate students but it can be much more difficult for other students to navigate different progression pathways which may involve different levels of learning or the need for subject interdisciplinarity. The Open University is one Alliance member which has attempted to tackle this through their PEARL<sup>11</sup> information resource, but a systems-level change is required.

### Focus on 'elite access' vs achieving change at scale

Despite the successes around widening participation, there has often been too much focus on the challenge of getting a small number of high-performing students from state schools into high-tariff universities.

This is an important dimension of widening participation, and we have to start from the ambition that everyone should be able to access the education that is best for them. However, this narrative risks giving insufficient attention to the benefits of achieving change at scale. Instead, we need to look at the wider education landscape in a joined-up way – schools, colleges, universities and work-based learning together.



## ELQ restrictions

The limits on funding available for equivalent or lower qualifications (ELQ) continues to disincentivise those who have already gone through the higher education system from re-entering to retrain or gain specialist skills. In the current system the majority of students who have already received an honours degree but wish to undertake either another degree in a different subject or to undertake a lower level course such as an HND are unable to access financial support.

Although there have been recent moves to relax this policy – in 2016, the government announced fee support will be made available for those wishing to undertake a second degree in a STEM subject – it still restricts participation because it is only limited to STEM. It is also important to note that in a rapidly changing and technology-rich world, progression is not necessarily about gaining higher and higher qualifications; in some cases, it could involve gaining a lower level – but more vocational – qualification after an Honours degree to fill a skills gap for specific employment.



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## What good practice is there in the UK?

Although there are currently a lot of factors which have limited lifelong learning, there have also been pockets of good practice.

The government recently released its Skills Plan based on the recommendations of the Sainsbury Review.<sup>12</sup> This includes raising the esteem of technical and vocational routes, and bringing them into line with traditional university routes. To do this, Sainsbury proposes streamlining the current system to create 15 high-quality common frameworks across technical education. It is important that these routes should extend all the way to Levels 7 and 8 and that universities with a strong track record in professional and technical education are involved in developing the pathways so that they support progression to degrees, degree apprenticeships and professional doctorates.

In 2000, the then government launched Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs) – fairly small amounts of public money, which were supplemented by individuals, that could be used to pay for adult training, in particular ICT training following the development of the internet and computers in the workplace. The scheme became beset by fraud and was closed in 2001, but the principles behind the accounts are still relevant. In fact, in 2004, ILAs were launched in Scotland for individuals with an income below £22,000. They offer valuable support for learners to undertake both part-time qualifications such as HNCs, undergraduate degrees and CPD courses and shorter, more vocational courses aimed at learners who might not have engaged with the education system for a long time. Statistics from Skills Development Scotland show the success of the system. In the financial year 2015/16, just under 36,000 ILAs were opened with over 33,000 courses booked. Figures from the first half of the year 2016/17 show that demand is set to increase with 19,000 accounts being opened and almost 18,000 courses booked.<sup>13</sup>

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## What do other countries do?

There are also positive lessons to be learnt from international examples.

In **France**, Personal Training Accounts – *Compte Personnel de Formation* (CPF) – were introduced in 2015 to help support and encourage lifelong learning. These built on the 2004 Individual Right to Training – *Droit Individuel à la Formation* (Dif) – programme which entitled individuals access to ‘learning leave’, i.e. fully paid leave of up to 20 hours a year for six years (up to a total of 120 hours).<sup>14</sup> The Dif programme was financed through a 0.2% payroll tax on all organisations with over 20 employees. The new CPF programme extends this entitlement to 150 hours of funded tuition and makes various

enhancements such as improving the way transfers work and loosening the requirements around study outside of working hours.<sup>15</sup> As of 1 January 2017 over 3.8 million CPF accounts have been opened with more than 700,000 courses validated for funding.<sup>16</sup>

In **Finland**, one of the basic principles for education is that all people must have equal access to high quality education and training. In practice this means that public authorities are monitored to ensure there are equal opportunities for every resident in Finland to get education, including opportunities after compulsory schooling, regardless of financial standing or age. 1.7 million people engage with adult education each year, over half of which are from the working age population.<sup>17</sup> In general the costs are heavily subsidised by the government, which foots around half the costs for adult education while the rest is paid for through student loans. Between 2003 and 2009, the Finnish government also ran the *Noste* programme, which aimed to raise the overall level of education in the adult population to strengthen participation in working life, offer career development for adults with only a basic education and fill skills gaps caused by the retirement of the post-war generation. By offering free vocational courses to those aged 30–59 years old the programme reached 25,680 students, over 7% of the total target population. Long-term evaluations of the programme showed it had a widespread and diverse impact. As well as improving participants' motivational levels, self-esteem and sense of security at work, it also created new models for adult learning and new outreach activities, which encouraged lifelong learning in the population outside of those targeted by the programme.<sup>18</sup>

Other countries have also introduced measures to encourage employers to allow, and employees to take up, opportunities for study leave. In **Austria**, for example, *Weiterbildungsgeld* allows employees, with the agreement of their employer, to take an educational sabbatical lasting up to one year (either taken at once or spread out over four years) during which employees are not paid by their employer but receive the equivalent of unemployment benefit. In **Singapore**, investment in the workforce through continuous education and training is a longstanding tradition. One example, the Workfare Training Support (WTS) scheme subsidises training costs for individuals without employer support, offers training allowances during the courses and a cash incentive for those who complete their training.<sup>19</sup>

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# What universities are doing to encourage lifelong learning



## CU Coventry: Creating more flexible learning opportunities to suit diverse student needs

CU Coventry – formerly known as Coventry University College – opened in 2012 to offer an alternative to the traditional full-time university experience. Focusing on professional and vocational higher education for school and college leavers as well as those who are already in work, the offer is built around allowing students flexibility to study at a pace which suits them.

Courses are created in partnership with professional bodies to certify they are industry-relevant and to ensure students leave with the skills and experiences necessary to further their careers. Each course is built from sets of 30 credit six-week modules which, unlike most universities, are taught one at a time rather than simultaneously and with assessments done at the end of the six weeks. Since there are no co-requisites or pre-requisites, each module is independent of any other enabling multiple entry points across the calendar year. Each year is also equivalent to an award (first year being an HNC, second year an HND, etc). This not only allows students to spread their progression across a period of time which suits them but it also means each module is eligible for student loan funding as the 30 credits is equivalent to 25% of an award. It also allows students to enter the course at a time that suits them as the College is able to offer six entry points across the year.

Structuring awards around modules allows students to study part-time or take modules as and when it suits them. It also allows students to complete their degree in two years through an accelerated programme (although this requires students to take out a £9,000 tuition fee loan for the two-year course rather than the £5,846 per year for the standard full time CU Coventry course).

The model has proved very popular and over the past six years, CU Coventry has been able to expand. It now has around 2,000 full-time and 500 part-time students and boasts a 93% retention rate. Despite this success, there have been a number of barriers which have hindered the College's progress. The funding regime limits how flexible the College is able to be. For example, students who start in January and who are not already on the accelerated degree programme are unable to complete additional modules once they have reached the 120 credit limit as they are not allowed to draw down additional loan funding. Instead they have to wait until January before they can resume their studies. Greater flexibility in the funding system would remedy this.

Image credit: Coventry University





## University of South Wales: Cementing progression pathways through partnership working

The University of South Wales (USW) is committed to lifelong learning. 43% of their student body is aged over 25 and 38% study on a part-time basis.<sup>20</sup> The university has achieved this remarkable feat by developing strong links with local further education colleges and working with them to provide high quality and industry-relevant 'HE in FE' for students who may be unable to move to a university, possibly due to work, family or caring commitments.

It builds on a programme that was developed initially through the Universities Heads of the Valleys Institute (UHOVI) to help students to enter or resume higher education study locally in a way that suits their needs. USW now partners with five FE colleges across south east Wales to deliver industry-relevant courses across a range of subjects. Student number planning is done jointly. The partners are also working to ensure that colleges and faculty offer courses which are relevant to the industries within their locality, aimed at people already in employment or preparing for work. The programme currently covers around 3,000 students across the five colleges. It has helped to improve the skills of local workforces and helped many disadvantaged students access higher education.

One of the major barriers that USW had to overcome was the lack of information and guidance for prospective students and insufficiently clear routes for progression and development. To tackle this, the university employed dedicated progression officers who were trained to understand and translate the different steps between HE, FE and lower-level study routes. The university now ensures that when students sign up to a course they understand where it can lead – for example, whether a financial course can lead to an accountancy qualification or whether an Animal Health foundation degree can lead to a BSc in Animal Management. This approach means students begin their study with realistic expectations of where the course can lead. They have also helped the university and partner colleges understand student concerns and potential barriers to engagement with higher education.

Pictured are two students who studied via UHOVI.

Amy Powell (right) studied Foundation Degree Salon Management at Coleg y Cymoedd and progressed to BA (Hons) Business Studies top-up at USW.

Ryan Davies (left) studied Foundation Degree in Sports Science, Exercise and Health at The College, Merthyr Tydfil before progressing to the final year of BSc (Hons) Sport and Exercise Science at USW.





The Open  
University

## The Open University: Lifelong learning at the heart of everything it does

The Open University (OU) was the world's first successful distance teaching university, founded on the belief that there were many more people who were capable of studying to degree-level than could attend traditional campus universities – and that communications technology could bring them high quality degree-level learning. Since its foundation in 1969, over two million people have studied with the OU and approximately 180,000 people (over 10,000 from overseas) now study either on qualifications or individual modules. Of these, 73% are working full- or part-time, over 10% declare a disability and there are 1,800 students on more than 200 courses in 150 prisons or secure environments.

The OU's model of supported open distance learning allows a learner to study when and where they wish, at an intensity they choose themselves, through a variety of media and with a range of support options. Such flexibility also extends to subject choice. As the most flexible degrees in the UK, learners can design their own qualification to suit personal and professional needs, interests and aspirations, mix and match subjects, or combine one main subject with a few modules from other areas. It is easy to change direction if study interests change and many Open programme students bring credits from higher education studies completed elsewhere.

Central to the OU's success has been securing partnerships to ensure they can reach the widest possible range of learners. For example, it works closely with broadcast media providers to generate 250 million views a year of OU content, and provide free learning for nine million active learners through YouTube, Amazon and Google Play, as well as free Open Educational Resources for millions of people through Openlearn and Futurelearn. Through the OU Anywhere App, registered students can now download all their learning materials as ebooks and resources to use offline.

More recently, and using HEFCE funding for National Networks for Collaborative Outreach, the Social Partnerships Network (SPN), a group of organisations including the WEA, Unionlearn, the Learning and Work Institute, the Association of Colleges and National Council for Voluntary Organisations, among others, has produced PEARL. Developed with the intention of becoming a 'go-to' resource for those trying to find their way through the plethora of pathways available to adults, it contains a sophisticated diagnostic in the form of an 'Advise Me' tool which personalises IAG to individual requirements and characteristics of the enquirer. The SPN also provides free online courses from which learners can receive a badge to display on their CV or LinkedIn profile. This is a helpful first step for those who want to explore what area they would like to work in or the steps needed to get there.







Sheffield Hallam University (SHU), like all Alliance universities, works closely with employers to create flexible learning options to support industry needs. One example is their work with Barratt Developments to offer a bespoke foundation degree that develops the qualities and skills needed to excel in the housebuilding industry.

The construction industry is in the midst of massive change. Off-site manufacturing and the need for energy efficient properties means staff need to be up-skilled. Many in the industry work for subcontractors who do not necessarily have the infrastructure or appetite to invest in training. Housebuilders are seeking an additional 120,000 workers in an industry that needs to find one million new people in a decade. The industry also has an ageing population with many experienced site managers due to retire in the next 5–10 years and the rate of those coming through the Apprenticeship and Graduate Programmes were not enough to fill the need.

SHU worked with Barratt to design and develop a foundation degree in Residential Development & Construction in just nine months, and to ensure the programme was accredited by the Chartered Institute of Builders (CIOB). The course focuses on the principles of housebuilding while developing skills and knowledge through academic study and work-based learning. Teaching modules are tailor-made for Barratt Developments with real projects used as case studies to support the learning experience. Successful candidates achieve a foundation degree after three years, with the option to top-up to a full BSc (Hons) degree over a further 18 months. During the process, candidates are also supported by mentors to help transfer learning into practice.

The course has so far been very successful: 89% of the first cohort have received a distinction or merit after the first year. It is attracting increasing numbers of mature individuals as well as school leavers, particularly ex-forces and returners to the industry. Barratt have also found that retention is very high compared to those not on the programme. The relationship continues to develop with the launch of a Quantity Surveying degree programme in 2016/17. Furthermore, with the development of degree apprenticeships and the Apprenticeship Levy, SHU and Barratt will redevelop the programme and launch a degree apprenticeship in September 2017.

Pictured are SHU students Helen Wood, Layla Barakat and Shaniqua Johnson.  
Image credit: Sheffield Hallam University.

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# Recommendations

## Improving Information, Advice and Guidance

1. Create a centralised advice and admissions service for lifelong learning courses, similar to UCAS, complemented by 'community learning centres'. Together these will provide impartial and expert information, advice and guidance to prospective students.

The full range of learning opportunities, courses and training within the current system is not readily understood and so individuals may not take up opportunities because they are not aware that they exist or that there is additional support associated with them.

A centralised advice and admissions service, possibly building on existing platforms, such as the OU's PEARL resource, would allow prospective students to see the types of courses available, who offers them and how to apply.

An online portal could be combined with 'community learning centres' – physical sites within towns and cities, possibly within Job Centres or libraries, where prospective students could talk to experts face to face. In some cases, they might also be suitable places for delivering learning. They would advise potential students on how to gain recognition for existing credits or informal learning and build on these through further study. They could focus on supporting people in work, and in low-paid work, who would benefit from information, advice and guidance on how to access further learning opportunities but are not able to access support available to some others, e.g. through Job Centres because they are not receiving benefits. Crucially, these centres would involve real people providing face-to-face advice alongside online resources to help people make sense of the myriad of different education, training and subsequent employment options available in their locality. Some 'first line' teaching could happen in these centres, giving students a taster of HE in a convenient and accessible location.

Schools and other institutions such as further education colleges, universities and Job Centres should be able to access a map showing what education and training options are available throughout life, helping to normalise the idea of entering and re-entering education.

Such a service should be led by an independent body such as UCAS and involve other sector bodies such as the Quality Assurance Agency, JISC, the UK Credit Forum and the Association of Colleges.

2. Recognise Centres of Lifelong Learning Excellence within regions to create a national network of lifelong learning excellence.

A scheme could be established to recognise and reward institutions which show excellence in adapting their provision and practices for lifelong learners. Within the sector, some institutions are working very hard to achieve this position, by adapting their programmes to make them more flexible or by introducing particular services for part-time and distance learners. Other institutions may choose different priorities. The purpose of a specific scheme for Centres of Lifelong Learning Excellence would be to ensure that institutions can obtain recognition – ideally supported by a modest stream of funding – for working to advance the position of lifelong learning. The scheme would resemble the previous Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs) scheme, but would be more focused on the specific student demographic it is aiming to help, and concentrated into a smaller number of institutions to maximise its effectiveness. By taking a regional approach, it would be hoped that students in the widest range of areas would have easy access to a local Centre of Excellence.

This network of centres would provide national coverage and stimulate engagement across the whole of the UK. It could also be responsible for linking local centres of excellence and conducting research and projects to identify, understand and support what and how mature learners want to study.

3. Reintroduce Individual Learning Accounts to support flexible learning throughout life.

It can be difficult for individuals to understand the various forms of financial support available for further study. To redress this, we suggest that Individual Learning Accounts are reintroduced. In their most basic form, they can be used to highlight individuals' entitlement to education and skills development. Over time, they can also be used as a repository for additional support such as help for retraining following the loss of a major employer in an area.

### Create flexible funding

4. Expand the coverage of Advanced Learner Loans to allow students to spend their loans on modular learning. This will enable students to learn as and when they want to.

Advanced Learner Loans have recently been expanded to include those aged 19 and higher (from 24+) and to encompass additional levels of study (up to level six). These loans should now be developed to support students to spend their loans on modular learning. Individual modules, offered by either single

or multiple providers, would build up over time into a fully accredited and recognised qualification. This type of learning, which is easily combined with work and family, should be more attractive to disadvantaged learners who are often put off by the prospect of undertaking a full qualification in one go.<sup>21</sup>

## Accelerated degrees

5. Create flexibility within the funding system to allow universities to offer accelerated degrees. This will enable students to complete their degrees at a pace which suits them.

For some students the ability to complete their programme of study more quickly than the normal pace is highly desirable. They may be re-training and wish to re-enter the labour market as quickly as possible. Accelerated degrees are currently an unusual and low-volume mode of provision in the UK. If expanded, they hold out the prospect of opening an alternative route to a degree for student groups who may have strong motivations for rapid completion. At present, however, institutions seeking to offer this mode must make significant groundwork investment for programmes that will generate comparatively low income – because they are restricted from charging fees at a level that covers the costs, under arrangements designed for full-time traditional students. Although many institutions have adapted their provision to accommodate this, it is not always possible and rarely makes sense at larger scale. Accelerated provision could also be beneficial for mature students as they would require lower maintenance loans and a shorter time away from work.

## Incentivising collaboration and co-investment

6. Introduce the Help to Learn Bonus<sup>21</sup> – a government top up given when people invest their own money in courses. A small cash entitlement would also support take-up of learning opportunities.

The Learning and Work Institute argued for a Help to Learn Bonus. We support this and encourage government to add an additional ‘top up premium’ when individuals invest money in certain learning opportunities. Such an approach could be used to promote certain industries or skillsets for which there is a particular skills gap.

7. Broaden the Apprenticeship Levy to include lifelong learning courses. This will give employers greater flexibility in how they support workers to gain new skills and retrain for new roles within their organisation.

The Apprenticeship Levy could be used better to encourage lifelong learning. As it currently stands apprenticeships are narrowly defined and messaging

around them has focused on getting young people onto career pathways. Introducing flexibility so that employers can spend their levy on lifelong learning courses would not only encourage and develop these courses but also allow companies to spend their levy on the courses and skills they need to help transition staff into new careers in different areas of the business.

Alongside, specific industries, which are seen to be underinvesting in skills development, could be targeted to promote lifelong learning. This might include accelerating the set-up of apprenticeship standards.

8. Encourage universities to work with public institutions such as museums, libraries and schools, as explored in the Family Learning Pilots by the Learning and Work Institute (LWI), to raise attainment and aspiration.

Finally, universities should be encouraged to work with local schools, museums and other communities outside of school hours. Family Learning Pilots,<sup>22</sup> carried out by the LWI, showed that increasing the literacy and numeracy of family members has a positive impact on the take-up of learning opportunities.

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## Endnotes

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20. HESA, Student Numbers, 2014/15

[www.unialliance.ac.uk](http://www.unialliance.ac.uk)

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